THE RAGTIMER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1981

PUBLISHED BY
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE
PRESERVATION OF
CLASSICAL RAGTIME

COMMERCIALLY PUBLISHED FOLIOS

(Price includes postage and handling)

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RAGTIME...
UNDER YOUR HAT

FOUNDED 1962
INCORPORATED 1970

THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

is a non-profit corporation having the following objects;

To preserve classical ragtime music and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in classical ragtime music and music related thereto.

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1981

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Editor - Jack Hutton

With this issue, we've reversed the lyrics of Bing Crosby's old hit, "It's June in January..." Due to a series of circumstances, this first issue for 1981 is entering the mails far past its normal deadline.

We'd like you to know, however, that our New Year's resolution is to put the Ragtimer back onto a schedule that will allow you to count upon an issue every two months.

As you'll read later on in a message from our new editor, Jack Hutton, the next two issues will be arriving soon in your mailbox.

And, speaking of deadlines, we are only months away from an important milestone: the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Ragtime Society. That's right -- 20 years. Two decades!

How do you celebrate the 20th anniversary of a group that some people thought would never survive its first anniversary?

If you have ideas, we'd be delighted to hear them. Why not put them on paper and share them with us, c/o the Ragtimer (the address is at the bottom of this page).

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RECORD REVIEW

by
TEX
WYNDHAM

C. K. Records OKeh 41273 'Cooking With Jazz', by Charlie Rasch, piano, and Kate Ross, banjo.

Selections: Limehouse Blues, 11:30 Saturday Night, My Honey's Lovin' Arms, There Ain't No Maybe In My Baby's Eyes, The Creole Love Call, Tiger Rag, I've Found A New Baby, Sweet Georgia Brown, Wob-A-Ly Walk, With Pleasure, Dixie Jass Band One-Step, Ballin' The Jack, Lies, There'll Be Some Changes Made, Five Foot Two.

Available, price unknown, through Charlie Rasch, 1667 W. Lincoln, Birmingham, Michigan 48009.

Some of the Society's early Bashes were adorned by the accomplished, big-sounding, piano-rollish tickling of Detroit's Charlie Rasch, whose playing was also the subject of a now out-of-print Society-produced Lp. His many friends who read this column will thus be interested to hear of his new album, on which he is supported by his long-time associate, banjoist Kate Ross. Unfortunately, a number of the tracks are rather superficial run-throughs of somewhat tired evergreens, made more difficult to enjoy by the recording balance, which gives the banjo accompaniment much too prominent a place. Once you get this adjusted (I had to turn the banjo track completely off), you'll find that Charlie really rolls out crisp, hot, raggedy choruses toward the finales of several selections, but that 'Cooking With Jazz' as a whole is well below the standard of previous Rasch-Ross issues.

* * *

Euphonic ESR 1220 'The Legend Of Lingle', piano solos by Paul Lingle.

Selection: Original Rags, Daddy Do, The Girls Go Crazy, Muscle Shoals Blues, Just A Closer Walk With Thee, Bill Bailey, Unidentified Rag, Little Rock Getaway, Sidewalk Blues, St. James Infirmary, Chimes Blues, That's A Plenty Rag.

Available @ $7.95 in the U.S., plus 50¢ elsewhere, from Euphonic Sound Recording Co., 357 Leighton Drive, Ventura, California 93001.

ESR 1220 follows up ESR 1217 (see The Ragtimer, November/December 1979) with a second helping of cleanly articulated, strongly-rhythmic 1951 in-person piano solos offered to the patrons (who, happily, are not excessively obtrusive) of Oakland's Jug Club. While only three of these excellent renditions strictly qualify as "rags", Lingle's basic approach (keeping the melody to the fore, while supplying an ever-changing background of decorations -- trills, rolls,

fills, breaks, two-four-or-even-eight-to-the-bar) is really closer to the ragtimer's than to that of the jazzman who typically chooses to improvise new melodies. 'The Legend Of Lingle' is unfailingly

satisfying, showing an active mind at work establishing tasteful and inventive embellishments that progress, on the longer titles, to some beautifully-wrought closing choruses ('Muscle Shoals Blues', 'Sidewalk Blues', 'St. James Infirmary'). The program embraces a pleasing contrast of accessible up-tempo works and stick-to-the-ribs blues, providing enjoyable and rewarding listening while also furnishing the best support on wax these ears have heard for the substantial claims made on Lingle's behalf by those who heard him in the flesh.

* * *

Snow LN 1001 'Marc Herouet's Ragtime Cats'

Selections: Lydian Dance, The Ragtime Oyster Man, Maple Leaf Rag. A Real Slow Drag, Pine Apple Rag, Carthago, Pluggin' In, Hot Scotch Rag, Sarah Dear, Riverag, Binks' Waltz, Le Chant Des Canons.

Personnel: Kouba Seczepanski, violin; Marc Herouet, arranger (all selections except 'Carthago'), piano; John Valcke, bass, backup vocal; Bob Dartsch, drums, percussion, vibes; Martine Kivits, Veronique Peynet, vocals.

Available @ 500 Belgian francs from Marc Herouet, Avenue Vendromme 9, 1160 Bruxelles, Belgium.

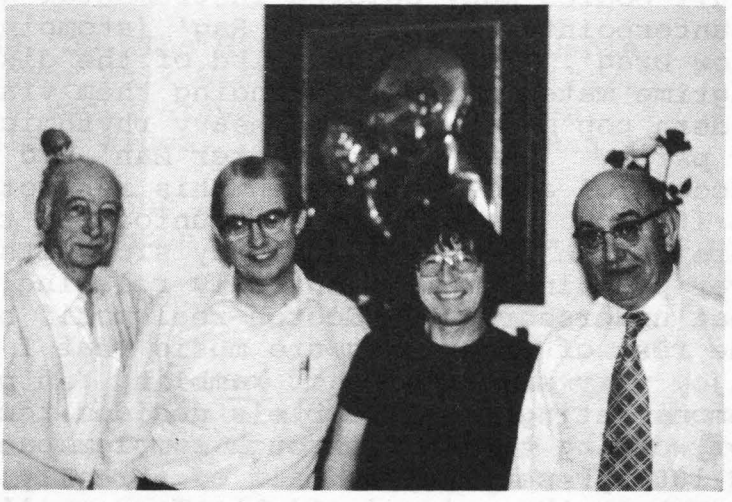
Traditionally-minded listeners will go for four Joplins (including two non-rag pieces) interpreted by this Belgian sextet with skill and taste to bring out the best in Joplin's conceptions: 'Sarah Dear' (lovely three-voiced close-harmony vocal), 'Binks' Waltz' (full-bodied many-colored instrumental quartet chart with active counterpoint), 'Pine Apple Rag' (stomping and joyous) and 'A Real Slow Drag'. The second third of the disc is more adventurous, using ragtime materials but extending them via incorporation of devices from modern pop music, such as heavy rhythmic suspensions and overdubbing of parts: 'The Ragtime Oyster Man' and 'Maple Leaf Rag' are quite successful and absorbing in this respect, Herouet's 'Riverag' less so as its updated portions seem unfocused to me, and 'Hot Scotch Rag' more on the amusing-but-fluffy side, its fast music-boxy piano opening over pounding drums eventually relaxing into down-homey, loping fiddling that underscores the Scotch-reel motif built into the latter strains. The rest of the titles are music that I don't really understand (or enjoy very much), kind of rambling and pretentious, though nevertheless demonstrating the ensemble's decided technical ability and aptitude for working together through complex passages. Judged as ragtime, LN 1001 presents about half of a really good Lp, but that may not be enough at the price in light of prevailing exchange rates.

WE'RE JUST WILD ABOUT EUBIE

The Ragtime Society sent its best wishes and love to Eubie Blake on the eve of his 98th birthday through a telephone call from Society president John Arpin. But we were far from the only ones who noted the birthday of this much loved man.

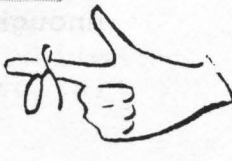
On the morning before his Feb. 7 birthday, Eubie appeared on a New York TV show and modestly remarked that perhaps 10 people would remember his birthday. On the contrary, he and his wife, Marion received a small flood of best wishes and cards at their Stuyvesant Avenue home in Brooklyn. And, on the night before his birthday, about 250 well-wishers sang and performed Eubie's music at a 90-minute bash in the courtroom of the Brooklyn Borough Hall. Eubie was presented with a chocolate three-tier cake, topped with a glazed piano and a hand-written copy of Memories of You.

One of those present was Lionel Hampton who recorded Memories of You at the age of 16 for Louis Armstrong.



MEET YOUR SOCIETY DIRECTORS: Left to right are Bill McCrostie, Director; John Fairhead, Treasurer; John Arpin, President; and Mark Wittman, Director. Mark's wife, Marjory, a fellow Director, was absent when the photo was taken.

HAVE YOU MAILED IN YOUR CHEQUE FOR YOUR 1981 MEMBERSHIP? IF NOT, WHY NOT DO IT TODAY .....



ALEX WAS MR RAGTIME IN CANADA

By Jack Hutton

Is there a major city anywhere in Canada or the United States without at least one pianist entertainer with the word "Ragtime" inserted into his name. The colorful billing instantly conjures up visions of arm bands, straw boater, sawdust on the floor and a two-fisted entertainer at an upright. Before the piano player has touched one key, you have the warm feeling that you're in for a good time.

In Canada, thousands of people identified that image for decades with one individual, regardless of whether they lived in a Toronto condominium or on a prairie farm. The man was Alexander "Ragtime" Read who died last Nov. 22nd at the age of 57 after a losing battle with cancer.

His death in a hospital just west of Toronto (Mississauga) meant more than the loss of a popular entertainer because for at least two generations of Canadian radio and TV listeners he was synonymous with that mysterious something called *ragtime* — even though he rarely thought of himself the same way.

I remember racing to the TV set a quarter of a century ago after hearing an announcer say that Alexander "Ragtime" Read would play a solo later in a popular CBC program called Mainstreet Jamboree.

The slight pianist with a touch of elegance (was it the neatly trimmed Clifton Webb moustache?) never disappointed basement amateurs like myself. His solos, frequently accompanied by banjo and other rhythm instruments, showcased popular tunes or near-popular tunes in a syncopated style that we tried to ape for days. It sounded simple. Yet, as I heard Dick Wellstood remark the other night on a U.S. TV program: "Count Basie's playing is remarkably simple — so simple that it's almost impossible to find anyone who can duplicate it." Exactly.

I remembered all that when I heard that Alex Read had died in a Mississauga Hospital. And, at the same time, I decided to learn more about the man whom I had never met but who was a household name for thousands of Canadians, and equally familiar to those who heard him perform at the Ragtime Society's annual bashes in Toronto.

It may surprise ragtimers that, out of five albums recorded by Alex Read, only one was ever sold directly to the public. The earlier four were used by the Toronto-based Canadian Talent Library to encourage greater exposure of Canadian musicians on the country's airwaves and were available only to radio stations. (One has possibly the world's shortest recorded solo. **Shave and a Haircut** — three seconds!) Even Alex's wife, Pat, didn't have the four CTL albums until shortly after his death.

Was he a ragtime pianist? Alex, who lined up for two hours the last time that Horowitz came to Toronto, would have denied it. But, as someone once remarked, Alex Read played two things when he sat down at a piano — the piano and his audience. He knew what they wanted and — dare I use the phrase? — he wasn't ashamed to play honky-tonk piano. The saving grace was that he happened to play it damn well, walking that fine line that David Jasen frequently does between traditional ragtime and the noisy beer parlour

world of honky-tonk piano, that no-man's land in which thumb tacks and spilled drinks can drag a piano out of tune before the waiter comes back for a second round.

Alex Read was no stranger to saloon audiences. He probably owed his universal appeal to the lessons he learned in that nightly treadmill. But that's not how he entered the world of music — far from it.

It was 1939 or 1940 when a skinny kid called Alex Read talked the owners of a small town radio station into hiring him to do a combination of comedy and piano. That was in Niagara Falls, his home town. Already he had completed his musical degree with the Toronto Conservatory of Music and had a local reputation as a bit of a prodigy.

Alex Read's career was rudely interrupted in the same way as thousands of other young Canadians. For the remainder of the war, he served in the Canadian navy, confining his piano playing to entertaining friends over drinks in the mess. But the bug had bitten: soon after rejoining civilian life he and his wife moved to Guelph where Alex resumed his role as an on-air pianist-entertainer with radio station CJOY.

In 1950, the Read family moved back to Niagara Falls and a new association with a nearby radio station (CHML in Hamilton). That was about the same time that a U.S. serviceman brought back a German record which was to have a great impact on a whole generation of piano players. A Tennessee piano player familiar to all of us as Johnny Maddox re-recorded the German piano solo on a purposely un-tuned piano. Maddox was probably as startled as everyone else when his rag medley record (remember his **Glad Rag Doll?**) sold more than 2 million copies. Up in Canada, a piano player called Alex Read was listening with intense interest because the piano style struck a responsive chord with him.

The metamorphosis of Alex into Alexander "Ragtime" Read was completed by the arrival in Toronto of a whisky-voiced entertainer called Ragtime Bob Darch in 1956. Darch, who brought his straw hat, brocade vest, arm garters, watch fob and an acoustical weapon called a Five Pedal Upright Saloon Grand Piano to Club 76, infected Alex with his contagious enthusiasm for ragtime (plus a lengthy list of others, including John Arpin). Years later, I heard Alex Read tell Bob Darch at the 1978 Ragtime Bash: "You know, Bob, you got me into this business."

That wasn't exactly accurate because Alex Read started playing professionally at the age of 16 or 17. But he was probably acknowledging that Darch introduced him to an extensive repertoire of tunes that were rarely played: Joseph Lamb, Rube Bloom, Scott Joplin and others that the man-on-the-street wouldn't recognize until a movie called **The Sting** came along many years later. (Most still would recognize only Joplin out of that list).

In 1960, Pat and Alex Read moved to Mississauga, just west of Metro Toronto, and Alex expanded his involvement with both Canadian radio and TV. He had a weekly hour-long variety program on CBC radio. He had a program called Hoop-de-doo with a Dixieland band. He was a guest performer on countless radio and television programs. Off the airwaves, he was a crowd-drawing performer at a succession of lounges, including the Nickelodeon, the Seaway Hotel and the Chez Paree (now gone) in Toronto. Across Canada, the albums produced by the Canadian Talent Library made him a household name for radio listeners who hadn't already seen him on television (remember that a lot of families like my own resisted buying that new gadget until the early 1950's).

The only time in my life that I ever saw Alex Read in person was at the 1978 Ragtime Bash. I was preoccupied with completing a magazine article on ragtime that weekend, but I listened carefully when Alexander Read mounted the platform just before the evening program began. So this, I thought to myself, is Alexander "Ragtime" Read, finally in front of me.

I was surprised by what he first played: something like **Ain't She Sweet** accompanied by a self-deprecating monologue about how he learned to play the piano. Then I realized we'd seen only the comedian side when he played in all seriousness one of his own compositions, the **Dominant Rag**. I made a mental note that Read looked much more frail than I recalled from television as I resisted the impulse to add a whistle to my applause for **Dominant Rag**. I also made a mental note to find out where I could get the music.

Like other ragtimers who have similar opportunities, I realize that I should have spoken up that night. Randy Read, who followed his father into the entertainment profession, would also like to find the music for **Dominant Rag** — even a tape.

The music doesn't exist anymore. We all heard the fine tune that October evening at the Cara Inn, but the only hope of retaining **Dominant Rag** for posterity relies upon the possibility that someone taped it. (EDITOR: Most restrict their taping for the official program of the afternoon and evening, but we'd be elated to hear from anyone who has the dinner hour segment).

Fortunately, we have more than enough other evidence of Alex Read's talent. The one record issued publicly by the Canadian Talent Library includes **Russian Rag**, the 1918 hit which George L. Cobb expanded into the **New Russian Rag** five years later with a bow in the direction of Rachmaninoff (George Foley, Cleveland's contribution to the Ragtime Society, recorded the 1923 version in a now-out-of-print album. Through clenched teeth, I might add that George recorded it one day before or after he shaved for the first time, not many years ago. A pox on such talent!)

The same album by Alex Read included the **Dill Pickles Rag**, written by Charles L. Johnson in 1907 and the piano bench standard from 1929, **Wedding of the Painted Doll**. That combination of ragtime and novelty rag entitles Alex Read to recognition as an early populizer (is there such a word?) of the ragtime style. He was there long before Joshua Rifkin, Dick Hyman and others brought ragtime into the front parlour.

But, as someone once remarked, the public's memory is short.

Toronto broadcaster Bill McVean, who knew Alex Read through mutual involvement at Hamilton's CHML, paid high tribute to him on Toronto's CFRB radio station. Entertainer Gordie Tapp, internationally known through his appearances on the U.S. TV program "Hee Haw" said of Alex Read at an informal but affectionate funeral service: "How do I remember Alex Read? He was a nut — but a great nut!" Not one of the three Toronto daily newspapers, however, recognized in print that the Toronto community had just lost a musical legend.

As a kid who raced to the TV set to watch Alex Read's fingers a quarter of a century ago, I hope this makes up in a small way for my fellow news writers who have always overlooked important things like ragtime and music that makes people happy. That's what Alex Read was all about. Thanks, Alex.

Meet a fellow ragtimer :Vincent Terbois

Vincent Terbois is living proof that Switzerland is more than yodelling and the Alps. A businessman in Geneva, Switzerland, Vincent has never attended the annual ragtime bash in Toronto but has been a faithful member of the Ragtime Society since its birth. He has a great collection of early ragtime music plus Fats Waller and James P. Johnson , and would like to correspond with others who are interested in cakewalks. "I'm taking lessons now from a young chap, but I wonder if I'll ever be able to play three choruses on end," he told the Ragtimer .

Was it Lewis Carroll's rabbit who kept pulling out his watch and muttering, "I'm late, I'm late for a VERY important date!" That's exactly how your new Ragtimer editor has felt for the last couple of months.

Because this issue is late, some of the material was researched and written long before you received the last two issues for 1980. For example, you saw a brief obituary on Alexander (Ragtime) Read in the final 1980 issue. Long before it appeared, I had already written the article you see in this issue. We also have a special report on Eubie Blake's hospital stay, but it will have to await the next issue because his accident occurred in March.

You'll notice a few small changes in the Ragtimer, and I'd be grateful for any comments that you have about ways to improve.

It's my intention to include a backgrounder piece in each issue, rather than rely upon reprints from elsewhere. In the March-April issue, that will follow hot upon the heels of this issue, you'll meet Dick Hyman, who was kind enough to sit down for a Ragtimer interview in New York

I also can hardly wait to share a special feature that you'll see in the May-June issue. Acting upon a suggestion from Tex Wyndham, I wrote to several well-known ragtimers and asked for a list of 10 ragtime tunes that they would suggest to a ragtime novice who wanted to work on a repertoire. The ground rules were that the music had to be easily available, and also representative of ragtime.

Tex, the first to write back, said that wasn't his idea at all. He'd had something else in mind -- but he supplied a list. "What a lousy idea," wrote David Jasen who also provided an articulate presentation for the anonymous ragtimer. Dick Zimmerman went further than those two by providing a list which is literally a syllabus for a ragtimer who wants to tackle a project over several years.

The most beautiful part of that exercise was that not one of the three agreed with the others! I am hoping that once you have read the article you'll find the time to write with the favorites you thought should have been on the list.

It is probably obvious to you now that I'd like to see the Ragtimer involve you, the reader, more. If there is enough response, I'd like to start a small classified section for those who are looking for music, old records or who have information they want to share. The brief article on Vincent Terbois is hopefully the start of a series introducing ragtimers to each other. Send me a picture, some details about how you became interested in ragtime, and we'll carry it.

My term of office is for one year -- 1981 -- so let's have some fun together during that time!

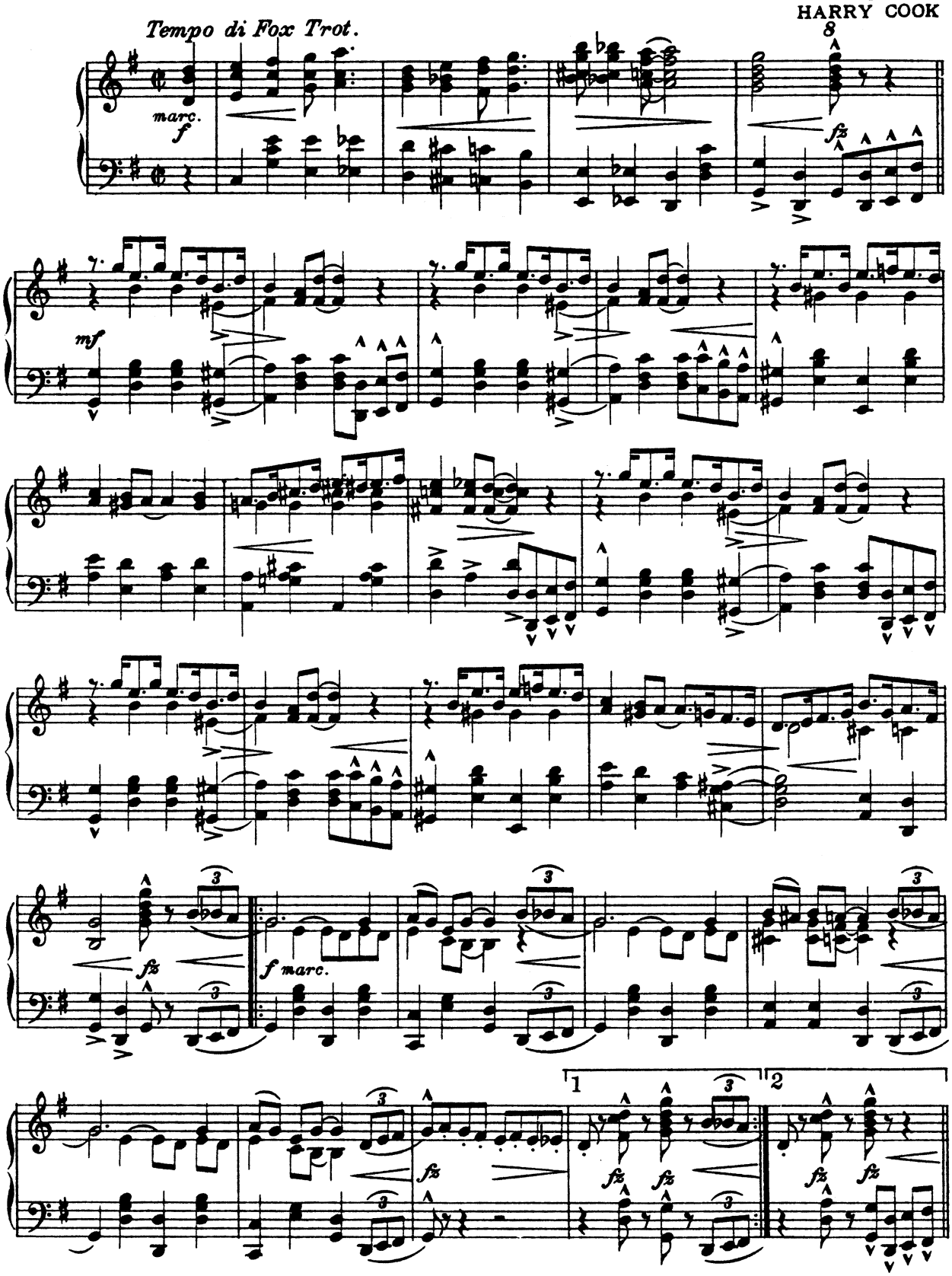
Zack Hutton

SIX BROWN BROS. BIG HIT IN "CHIN-CHIN" GLOBE THEATRE, N.Y.C.

THAT MOANING SAXOPHONE RAG.

FOX TROT.

TOM BROWN
AND
HARRY COOK

Tempo di Fox Trot.

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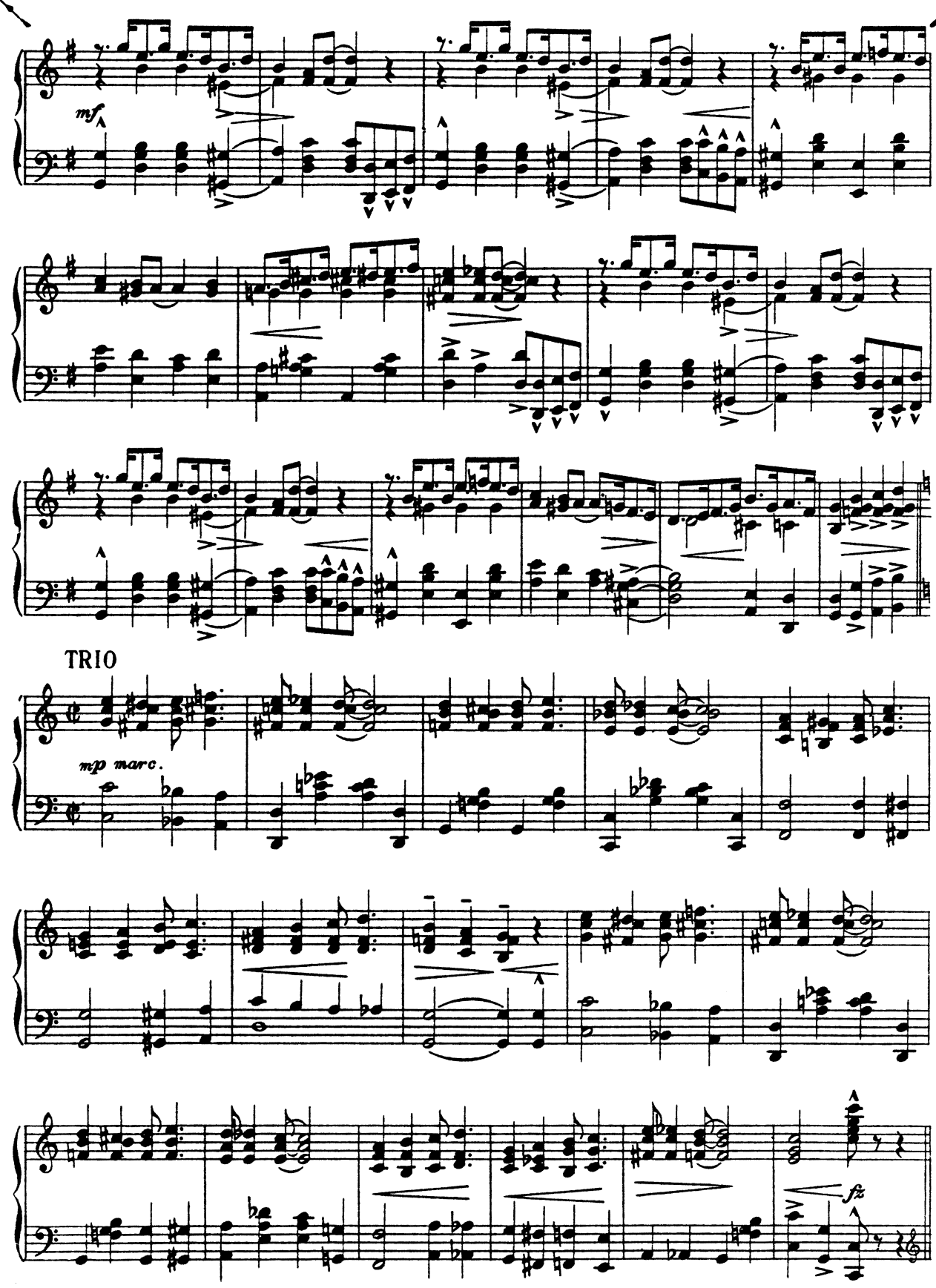
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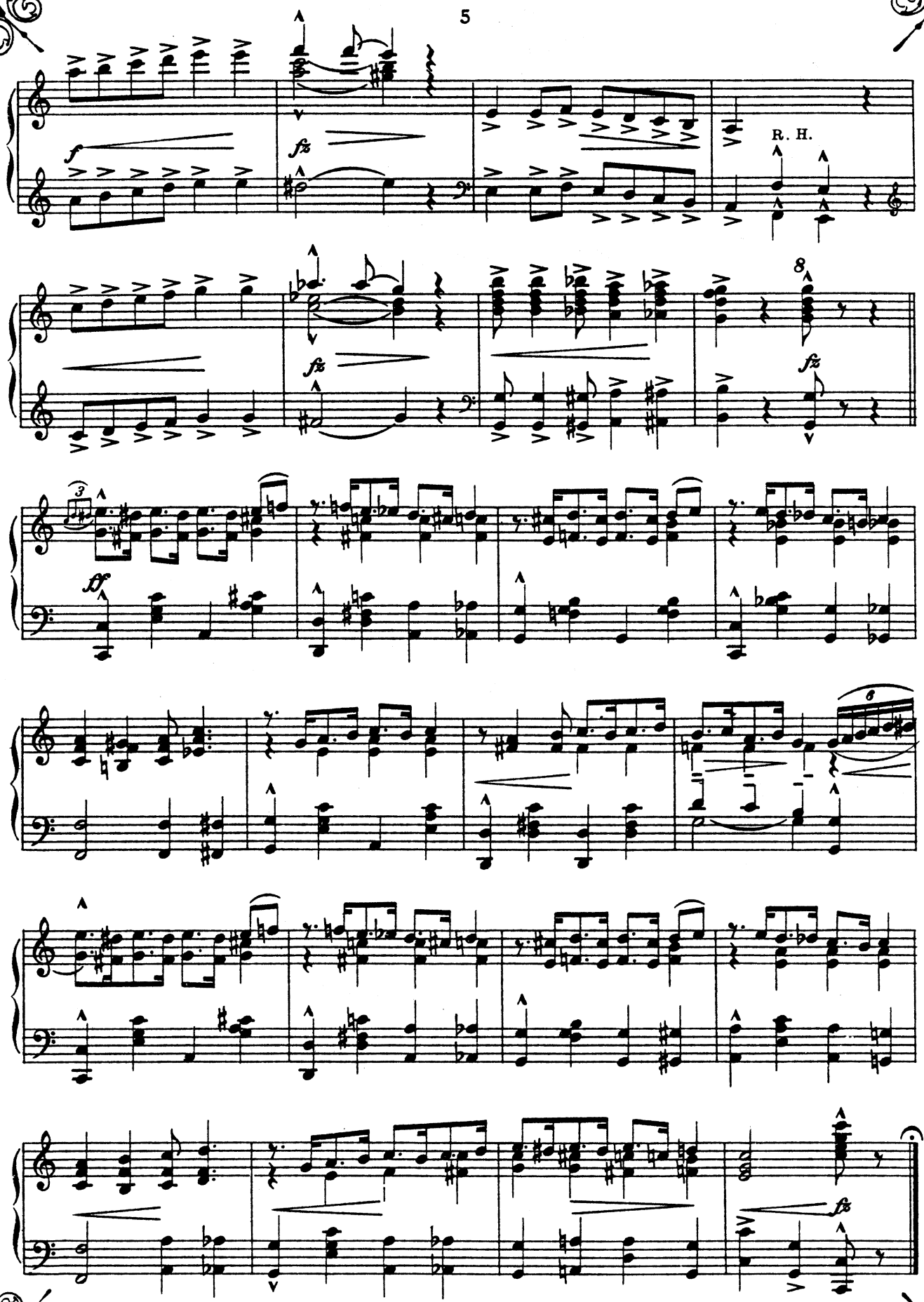
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RAGTIME BASH

WHEN?

THE WEEKEND OF OCTOBER

16-17-18

(Friday night, Saturday and Sunday)

WHERE?

THE CARA INN

6275 Airport Road

(Reservations will be accepted at any time)

MAKE YOUR PLANS NOW TO BE THERE!

THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
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DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

P. O. Box 520, Stn. A, WESTON,
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The RAGTIME SOCIETY is a non-profit organization which endeavours to find and preserve classical ragtime music, and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in this music and the music related thereto. Subscribing members receive the official publication of the 'SOCIETY' known as THE RAGTIMER on a bi-monthly basis. As a service to members, special offers are made from time to time in THE RAGTIMER. These consist of record albums, sheet music, books, etc. There is also a regular reporting of the ragtime scene on a contemporary as well as historical basis, timely record reviews and interesting articles.

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— INSTRUMENTAL —

THAT MOANING SAXOPHONE RAG

BY TOM BROWN AND HARRY COOK

TOM BROWN

FEATURED BY

BROWN BROS.

WITH

MONTGOMERY AND STONE

IN A MUSICAL FANTASY

"CHIN-CHIN"

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PIANO .60 ORCHESTRA .75